Great Agency Websites V. 2

Executive Summary

The original <u>version</u> of this white paper focused on three key components of an agency website:

- Exhibits a Professional Design
- Generates Visitors
- Encourages Action

Each of those items is just as relevant today. In order to help you achieve those objectives, this article focuses on tactical changes you can make to your website. Some are frequent, others less so.

Echoing the comments from version one of Great Agency Websites, an agency website need to be constantly refreshed to reflect positively on the business. Any agency that wishes to attract and retain clients via their web presence will need to allocate resources to maintain their website.

In this white paper, we will look at what you should be doing to keep your website up to date and position your agency positively in the mind of your customers and prospects.

Your Website: A Digital Version of Your Agency

An agency's physical space portrays an image of the business. You maintain that space regularly such as janitorial services, and less frequently with technology and furniture upgrades and remodeling.

Your agency's website is your virtual storefront. As such, it is critical that it is welcoming, well organized and showcases your capabilities and expertise. And just like your physical office, you should do maintenance, both on a regular schedule as well as upgrades from time to time.

Housekeeping

Some tasks need to be undertaken on a regular basis. Vacuuming, or collecting the used coffee cups and filling the dishwasher isn't glamorous. And while those efforts aren't as fun or impactful as completely redecorating the office, they are a key part of keeping up appearances.

Your website needs ongoing maintenance as well. Far and away, the most important item on the list is to regularly expand your website by adding content.

'Content' is a term that includes several different formats ranging from a blog entry to a new web page to a video. And while each of these items require slightly different methods to produce, they share a common purpose. This content enables you and your staff to demonstrate your expertise and personality to customers and prospects.

Many agencies have specialties or expertise that can be overlooked by prospective customers. Perhaps you have a number of clients in a specific industry or trade. What better way to attract new customers than by telling them about how you have solved problems for your clients who are just like them?

A good way to get into the habit of regularly updating content on your website is to create a content calendar. Start slow, targeting one topic per month. As you get comfortable with meeting that production schedule, you can increase the frequency of updates.

Here are a couple of steps to get you started building a content calendar:

- Create exercise with key staff to identify each participant's skills and expertise.

- Assign each participant a task to write (record, film) a piece that focuses on one of their identified skills, and a *calendar date for publication.*

- Determine editorial oversight.

- Identify who has the skills to make website changes - this might be an employee or a third party.

- Schedule a follow up meeting to gauge progress.

A great way to encourage new behaviors is to offer carrots for compliance. Perhaps the submission of a piece of content enables the author to leave after lunch on a Friday, or maybe it is an entry for a drawing for a gift card.

While completely outsourcing your content creation to third parties isn't ideal, you can certainly augment your efforts with good quality content from outsiders.

Another opportunity to show off your expertise is to create additional pages on your website. Perhaps your agency specializes in artisan contractors. A web page that highlights specific exposures that small contractors have, or how you can provide certificates 24/7 will solve a specific issue for prospects.

Insurance professionals are all about detail, right? That attention to detail is what creates an effective risk treatment strategy. If so, then why do so many insurance websites have obvious mistakes?

You'd be mortified to meet with a client with a coffee stain on your shirt, right? Bad grammar or misspellings are just as bad. Commit to having a disinterested third party review your site (especially new content, see editorial oversight above) regularly for mistakes.

Remodeling

How do you know when it is time for a complete web rebuild? Unfortunately, the answer is that it is probably more frequent than you want, perhaps every two to three years.

State of the art in web design is fluid and ever changing. Your website doesn't need to keep pace with every improvement but at some point, your website begins to look like one of those homes on the HGTV channel: All dark paneling and shag carpets.

The following evaluations are presented in order of difficulty, with those easiest to assess first.

- Can your visitors find your contact information easily? The primary purpose of your website is to provide customers and prospects with answers to their questions, but more importantly, to get them to reach out to you. If they can't quickly find out how to phone, email or text your agency, they'll find somebody else.

- Is your content consumer friendly and specific? Generic descriptions about your agency's attributes (Professional) or what you insure (All Lines) won't make the grade. Customers & prospects want answers to their questions, not vague platitudes.

- Are your images real photos of your staff and clients? Nothing screams 'generic' like stock photography.

- Is your site well organized? Think like an insurance newbie, not a professional. Do they really know that homeowner's insurance could be found under "Personal Lines"? Of course not. Organize your content in a way that makes sense to nonprofessionals.

- Is your site mobile enabled? In 2017, 50.3% of all searches took place from mobile devices. The good news is that financial-oriented websites still lean toward desktops. But the days of websites not being mobile optimized are over.

- Does your website use flash? If you don't know, your webmaster will. If it does, time to change.

- Are your page loads slow? Almost half of visitors will abandon a site if the page hasn't rendered within 2 seconds. As an aside, Google will downgrade you if your pages are slow.

- How do your pages rank in a search result? If your pages don't rank well in search, the only people who will find your agency will be those that know your agency's name. Unfortunately, Search Engine Optimization is a complicated, rapidly changing field, and there are few quick fixes. The scope of that discussion is beyond this white paper however.

The final question is probably the hardest to answer, and that is does your website 'look' clean and modern? Everybody has a different design aesthetic; what one agency principal thinks is perfect might be the worst for a different shop. But we can all agree that garish, text-only sites are so 1990's!

Conclusion

The new buyer's journey has changed the way customers interact with product and services providers. A modern, informative website is critical to presenting your agency in the best possible light, and to getting them to reach out to you when they are ready for more information.

Change is a constant, and in order to maintain a positive digital home, an agency must commit time, personnel and money to keeping their website up-to-date.